

BOOK REVIEWS

Science in Brazil

(SCIENCE, Vol. 256, 5 June 1992, p. 1464)

A Space for Science. The Development of the Scientific Community in Brazil. SIMON SCHWARTZMAN. Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1992. x, 286 pp. \$32.50. Revised translation of the Portuguese edition (1979).

A decade ago I attended, as the science counselor of the American embassy in Brasília, the opening in Campinas of a meeting of the Brazilian Association for the Advancement of Science. It seemed all too First World: a local symphony orchestra played classical music and the distinguished President offered opening remarks. Even the protesters, who interrupted but did not disrupt, seemed familiar. But then, right at the end, the orchestra struck up a well-known samba and everyone leapt into the aisles and danced, chins held high, singing "Brasil, Brasil" in a position the whole world has come to know from television coverage of Rio's Carnival extravaganza.

Samba (along with many other aspects of Brazilian life) contrasts strongly with the ideal so starkly inscribed on the national flag: "order and progress." There has nevertheless grown in this Third World country with First World ambitions a scientific community second only to India's among developing countries, with areas of excellence that compete in the major leagues. *A Space for Science* is the most comprehensive and intelligent account of Brazilian science, past and present, I have seen. Its availability in English in this extensively revised version is to be welcomed.

For Schwartzman, the glass is half empty, however. He opens with the myth of Sisyphus and chronicles the repeated, and only partly successful, efforts to promote scientific culture in Brazil. Eventually, efforts would crystallize around local health problems, minerals, animals and plants, the weather, solar eclipses: all provided reasons for scientific activity and left behind people and

institutions to carry it on, but none was strong enough as a social and intellectual force to support the scientific enterprise as a whole.

Only in the 1930s did Brazil acquire the kind of university, in São Paulo, that could sustain modern research and teaching of the sort known in the industrialized world. The ingredients of this development are well worth noting: the University of São Paulo was founded by the local elite, in reaction to the defeat of their political rebellion, with extensive help from French academics. The Paulistas might not be able to have their own country, but they would have their own education, one inspired by European culture.

Politics and foreigners have remained ingredients of Brazilian scientific development ever since. The French and Italians were especially important before World War II, but it was the Americans who would establish stronger links thereafter. Beginning with the Rockefeller Foundation's efforts in the 1930s, the United States became a source of funding, training, professors, and inspiration.

This foreign contribution to Brazilian science is not something all Brazilians want to hear about, and it gives some Americans pause as well. The political context of Brazilian science is highly nationalistic, at times even xenophobic. Science in Brazil has become associated not with European culture but with efforts to find substitutes for imports, to exploit the country's natural resources, and to develop the national economy.

After the military took over in 1964, scientists expected to suffer, and many left the country. Seeing one of them approaching me at a conference years later, I expected him to berate me for American support of the dictatorship, only to find him thanking me for the efforts of a predecessor of mine at the embassy who had helped him to leave the country on short notice to avoid arrest.

Scientists and soldiers in fact soon found more common ground than expected by applying science and technology to development. They reserved the domestic market for telecommunications equipment and computers, maintained a "parallel" (and in part secret) nuclear program distinct from that associated with safeguarded German sales of reactors and fuel cycle technology, and undertook a national missile program that aimed eventually at a space-launch vehicle.

I once knew well the major figures in these national programs, and it is hard for me to agree with Schwartzman that the glass is half empty. I take it from him that with the return to democracy and the economic crisis of the late 1980s science in Brazil has been less well supported than it was in the fading years of the military dictatorship, when I lived and worked there. But the excitement and vision of those who tried to forge Brazil's future through science and technology were inspiring even when their efforts were economically counterproductive, damaging the environment, and risky in terms of nuclear proliferation and sales of missiles Iraq and Libya.

The political context has now changed. Today, a well-known opponent of proliferation is a government minister, Brazil's economy is opening up, and the country hosting a world

environment conference that will unquestionably express concerns about the Amazon that the military regime would once have rejected out of hand. Schwartzman is disappointed that science for the sake of knowledge has not caught on in Brazil, but that it has caught on for any purpose should be a source of satisfaction those who wish that immense and populous country the best. Nothing against samba, course. But order and progress should hi their place as well.

Daniel SerwerAmerican Embassy, Rome, Italy